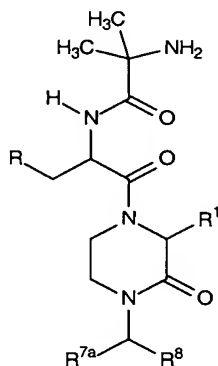


ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

MELANOCORTIN RECEPTOR LIGANDS

The present invention relates to compounds which comprise a nitrogen-containing ring scaffold substituted by an R¹ alkyl units selected from the group consisting of C₁-C₁₂ linear or branched alkyl, C₃-C₈ cyclic alkyl, C₂-C₁₂ linear or branched alkenyl, or haloalkyl, for example, the 2-keto-3-alkylpiperazines having the formula:



wherein R is selected from the group consisting of phenyl, 3-fluorophenyl, 4-fluorophenyl, 3,5-difluorophenyl, and 4-chlorophenyl; R¹ is selected from the group consisting of methyl, ethyl, propyl, *iso*-propyl, butyl, *iso*-butyl, *sec*-butyl, *tert*-butyl, cyclopropyl, cyclopropylmethyl, cyclopentyl, cyclopentylmethyl, cyclohexyl, cyclohexylmethyl, benzyl, allyl, 1-methylallyl, 2-methylallyl, but-2-enyl, and propargyl; R^{7a} is selected from the group consisting of hydrogen, -CO₂H, -CONH₂, -CONHCH₃, and -CON(CH₃)₂; R⁸ is benzyl, substituted benzyl, or naphthalen-2-ylmethyl..